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ABSTRACT

A "maps in the news" unit can be used to help middle and junior high school students in many subject areas recognize basic map components and identify and analyze thematic maps while building writing skills. Prior to beginning the unit, the teacher introduces students to thematic maps, the parts of a map, and writing organization (topic sentences, paragraph formation, concluding sentence). The map unit consists of three steps. First, students collect 12-15 thematic maps from recent journals and periodicals and mount these in a looseleaf notebook. Students then record key information about the maps. As a final step, students write a paragraph analysis of their maps' strengths and weaknesses. Skill objectives achieved through this unit include basic skills, independent work, and abstract thinking. (LP)

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A MAP LITERACY PROJECT

by
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A Map Literacy Project

by Diane Johnson

A "Maps in the News" notebook can be used to help middle and junior high school students in many subject areas to achieve map literacy. The project achieves three behavioral objectives: (1) students learn to recognize the basic components of a map; (2) students learn to identify a thematic map; and (3) students learn to analyze a thematic map. More generally, students acquire an understanding of the essential role that thematic maps have in the media. The notebook unit can take up four to five class hours, or it can be a continuous project designed to run throughout a semester course. Materials required include newspapers, magazines, scissors, glue, and construction or typing paper.

Instructor Activities

Prior to undertaking the project, the instructor acquaints students with some map skills. First, students should learn the differences between a general purpose map and a thematic map. General purpose maps, or reference maps, show a variety of items such as landforms, cities, and political boundaries, whereas thematic maps usually focus on a single subject such as climate, population, or crime. Second, students should review the basic parts to a map including title, scale, orientation, date, and source. Third, students should acquire a background in paragraph formation including topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence. Finally, the instructor shows students how to establish criteria for good thematic maps and then how to apply these criteria to various thematic maps.

Learner Activities

Each student should collect ten to fifteen thematic maps from news magazines, newspapers, and other periodicals. Students remove the map/article, make note of the source and date of each, and mount each on typing or construction paper, leaving the lower quarter of the paper empty. This task completes the initial step of identifying a thematic map.

The second step involves recognition of the basic components of a map. Beneath each mounted map, students should record (1) the title of the map, or if none is given, the title of the news article itself; the date of the news article or the date of the construction of the map; (2) the scale of the map; (3) the key or legend and note what it represents; (4) the name of the periodical or newspaper from which the map/article was taken. Finally, students should compose a sentence stating what they perceive to be the patterns shown on the map.

Map analysis is the third and most challenging step in the unit. In this step, each student should write a paragraph describing the strengths and weaknesses of each map. The students should consider questions such as: Is the map attractive; is the map too cluttered with unnecessary and confusing details; is the map oversimplified and lacking necessary information; is there a title, scale, and date, and is this information necessary for a clear reading of the map; is the key clearly labeled; is the map large enough to reveal its details clearly and; does the map help the reader to understand the article?

Evaluation

Teacher evaluation of the "Maps in the News" notebook is both objective and subjective. Evaluation of the choice



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of a thematic map in step one is straightforward because the teacher asks whether the student has chosen a thematic map. The evaluation of the labeling of the parts of the map in step two is also objective. The teacher asks whether each map part has been labeled correctly, the statement of purpose is in sentence form, and the statement of purpose reveals the student's understanding of the patterns on the map. Evaluation of the map analysis in step three is more subjective than previous steps. The teacher asks: Is the map analysis written correctly; has the student considered the qualities of the map from different viewpoints and been able to make decisions about the map; has the student related the map content to the article content; and does the student understand the map.

Uses in the Curriculum

This map exercise has several advantages. It is suitable for junior high/middle school-age students who need a combination of physical and mental activities in order to learn. All students are given the same basic skills to master by means of an independent project. Students begin the project with the concrete task of labeling the basic parts of a map. They proceed to more abstract thinking in the analysis of the thematic map. Students are required to use the skills inherent in the fields of art, mathematics, language arts, and social studies to produce a final product. Many of the news items may be used as a springboard for current events or future study discussions involving the entire class. Finally, the teaching unit contributes to the overall goal of helping students to think and see geographically.